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Our Shared Space and Threat Without Exit

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Our Shared Space and Threat Without Exit

Peer Review

This work has undergone a double-blind review by a minimum of two faculty members from institutions of higher learning from around the world. The faculty reviewers have expertise in disciplines closely related to those represented by this work. If possible, the work was also reviewed by undergraduates in collaboration with the faculty reviewers.

Abstract

Globalization is fraught with dangers due to institutional relationships that threaten humanity. These institutions, acting in unaware-concert, provide a looming danger for everyone in 21st century life. Humanity has created the threatening context; humanity bears the responsibility for its remedy. This is known as “world risk society” (Beck, 2009). The threat is all encompassing, grounded in material limits; no human is exempt from the danger. People can use these two features as fuel to politically engage and create meaningful change. It is this political context that requires generating everybody’s political will all the way from the heads of state to the average citizen.

This fictitious slam poetry piece seeks to generate political will within the reader. The “Reflections from 2013” are meant to emphasize the role of “manufactured uncertainties” (2009)—the human-made risky elements of globalization-- which create a pressure within the reader as they travel from the present into the four possible futures. The order of the futures is intentionally designed to increasingly generate a sense of political will as the reader progresses from the most structurally unsustainable future (Future I) to the most sustainable future (Future IV). The movement of the piece is a transition from the possibility of destruction to the possibility of adapting to a life affirming way of organization in the end.

Stories do not reveal how the future *will* go, only how it *could* go.

Stories do not unpack ideas in linear form. Rather, they allow for the reader to encounter embodied ideas.

Keywords

manufactured uncertainties, risk, globalization, slam poetry, sustainability

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Thank you to my mentor Sherrie Steiner for affirming my use of identity politics and showing me that slam poetry can be an appropriate method for research associated with political engagement.

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INTRODUCTION

The piece that follows was derived from my conversations with a faculty member about globalisation and its unintended consequences. The journey to the final topic was a lengthy process involving discussions about the impending Millennium Development Goals' 2015 deadline, interfaith dialogue, international relations, e-diplomacy and political legitimacy. It became clear that social problems loom large, international cooperation is fragile, and the need for political will has never been greater.

The 21st century global context is delicate for humanity and according to Ulrich Beck (2009) the fragility is due to our global institutions and their interactions. It is this same delicacy that can foster necessary political change. Fragile or not, if diplomatic relations were embedded in material pressures for international cooperation, it might be objectively possible (even if improbable) to generate the necessary political will to create a sustainable future (Steiner-Aeschliman, 1999). Beck's theory emphasises that the future is open: it depends upon the decisions that we make.

I decided to focus the work on creating a piece designed to open our mentally-closed futures. I used the method of slam-poetry to thoughtfully examine rhetoric and instill political will empowerment within the reader (Blitefield, 2004). This type of poetry is more than just an emotional encounter; slam poetry is a form of democratic engagement that expresses frustration over political disappointment as a catalyst for political action (Blitefield, 2004). Narrative poetry is used to open the future by considering multiple possibilities that are not *explicit* upon any *certain* course of action. The reader encounters the ideas and is changed through consideration of how history might be otherwise. Stories enable us to feel the weight of ideas by stretching our imagination from the abstracted realm of thought into the concretized forms of possibilities.

Literature concentrates the uncertainty of the future into narrations and thereby makes experienceable and perhaps even biographically and politically understandable. Threat, risk and manufactured uncertainty are put in relation to the past by narrative means (sagas, historical events, biographies, etc.), perspectivized through stories (myths); threats are "humanized," "played out," made "conceivable" and thereby socially meaningful. (Ulrich Beck, 2009, 298)

We are able to imagine, through stories, abstracted ideas in concretized forms and in doing so we challenge lines of linear logic which have contributed to the current global threats. The singularity of a hegemonically closed future (derived from the self-fulfilling prophecy of despair) is changed into a plurality of future possibilities. The use of story roots ideas into embodied forms that are palatable for people. This type of poetry can instill within the reader "the power to see, and perhaps, then, to do" (Blitefield, 2004).

OUR SHARED SPACE AND THREAT WITHOUT EXIT

Creating political will by looking into multiple futures

Prologue

In all time we stand on the coast of the irrevocable openness of the future, looking out into the infinite horizon of a sky that traces oranges and reds, yellows and purples into a milky array. The inevitable future summons our grandest dreams and calls forth our greatest fears. The

humanizing moment of meaning happens in our present as we face our biggest question: will we bleed together like the skies blended-beautiful palate and continue writing our story, or will we allow the sun to set on our hopes, allow the darkness of our fears, insecurities, and anger to take hold and pressure us to retreat from one another?

The Setting

In a world of parallel futures, we sit from the fragile present and forecast into the possible futures. The following are excerpts from the year 2025, from parallel earth worlds in the multiverse, that are not the way the future *will* be, but are possibilities of how the future *could* be based on what we see from the catastrophic threat of manufactured uncertainties. They are the accounts of various people, some of whom do not grasp the totality of the treacherous historical situations they live within. Interwoven in the future are reflections from our present vantage point, which shape the futures.

A Reflection From 2013

I tread across the earth, though my existence brief
Abiding only due to institutional mischief
They plotted and planned in specialised lands, not knowing I cause grief.
I can rain destruction, drops of nuclear fission
I can end the world now, with atomic division
I'll explode in this mode, death's potent vision

Future I

The year is 2025. I'm one of the unfortunate who have survived The Incident of Unmaking and now I am shaking as I report to you the fact that I am still alive. I lay bare witness to the fullness of what Spencerian rhetoric, armed to the teeth with power and pure logic, has reaped upon the world: all but nothing; nothing but havoc. Cynicism won the wrestle of meaning and I watched it all unfold as the jester's hurled bombs filled the skies and my anticipation of the devastation was momentarily replaced with elation as I beheld the heavenlies holding these weapons in her grip. Like fireworks, I forgot what they were and in that moment I wanted them to pop. They continued climbing higher and high, and for a second all activity was frozen in time, from our massive institutional global-movements, to the minuscule cellular groupings of micro-organelles going about their genetic trouping business. It was serene for a second, as if the flows of time were no longer linear, but instead was circular roving around the center. The past and the future were pushed to time's margins and the present moment expanded rendering all still in the grasp of the universes bosom, gently and mournfully, as if she held her creation in one final embrace before saying goodbye.

When gravity reminded the destroyers of their mass, they started dropping like rain and the light started sheering every piece of the horizon as billions of poor, helpless souls strove to cover their eyelids... cover their eyelids from the sky drinking its fill of exploding supernovas, hydrogen autom-as. The heaven's had their fill of potent-pure powerful energy as they were engulfed by bastionic blasts that shook the earth.

Those beasts of *abaddon* sought the destruction of the heavens with their thunderous booms that mocked like leering laughter. Theirs was the joke of humanities' disaster that we

chose to remaster and remaster what only a hyper-individualized, a hyper-autonomous-ized, civilized-ation, our civilized nations could contrive.

The world was too delicate; in our neo-liberal dreams we organized beyond our means and simultaneously externalized meaning and catastrophe to the individual so when the voices of an ethic grew, an ethic that required the communal-residual tones, we could not pay them heed for we thought they should have left well enough alone, “to each their own,” we droned and droned. Who could have thought our actions were never isolated, but always communally incriminated, never alone, but always organizationally executed; from the massive levels of nation state operation, to the personalised level of the individual, we always acted in community yet painted it through a lens of autonomy: too bad we don’t have thick enough lenses now to protect our retinas from protruding solar flares born from nuclear hostility.

A Reflection From 2013

In community I appear though no *one* will take response
Thinking they autonomous yet my reality haunts
They shy away, close eyes and play ignoring my pestilent taunts
I can run across the globe and disrupt wholly your market
Your store homes of wealth amassed, can solely be my target
Pay heed, your fallible greed, be unmade if you not harken.

Future II

“Brothers and Sisters thank you for coming this morning to celebrate the Sabbath. My name is Reverend O’Dooley, I have been the chaplain for *The Black and Gold Resistance* for the past four years. Faith in God, faith in the greater world, and faith in one another will be the keys to overcoming in the midst of these trying times. It’s been five years since The Resistance deviated from the global market takeover, since the last nation-state was officially and publicly put to death at the hands of the oligarchic multinational syndicate known as *Prosperity*, whom most of you are quite familiar with; after all, it is their existence that has defined our own. Most of you know the tale of how our faction came to be, but I have seen some new faces in the crowd and would like to bring them up to speed as to our origins. Please be patient for our new found members.

Now, onto the story.

The Resistance emerged as soon as the global multinational takeover occurred. During The Day of Decentralization, the corporate overlords, through strength gathered when bills such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership were passed, were finally able to reveal to the public their sovereignty as *the* true global power. The workers became aware of the overt power coercion too late, and thus, before the workers could sway the tides of history, the tyrants grasped the world’s throat. They, with cameras recording, tore apart the American Constitution and threw it into a cinder barrel, incinerating a symbol of the democratic experiment that had been waged and struggled for since the time of the ancient Greeks. After the Constitution was cremated, the Whitehouse was demolished as *the* sign of solidifying power. The world was in the hands of these masters of fortune who finally won the battle of free-market autonomy; the world had never been more liberated! But, the brilliant thing for the capitalist overlords was that they no longer had to heed to the niceties, the platitudes that were required of them for so long to speak. “Work hard now, invest in your present labours and you will reap the future reward.” They were free to be themselves, torn away from the layers of decent language that could convince the enslaved working masses that they were actually noble institutions. No, the lie was over. Now

they could freely and honestly reap the benefit of dehumanizing exploitation; the broken bones and broken spirits of billions of humans that propped up their greedy empire.

The workers that were required for the success of the titanic-corporations that formed the body of *Prosperity* were disillusioned with rhetoric that spewed forth from their daily taskmasters and the never ending production their overlords required. Yet, there was no institution where they could seek out help; democracy was institutionally distinguished. They were at the mercy of vituperate organizations wanting only to increase the wealth of their syndicate and that of their stakeholders. This was however, unacceptable to a renegade band of freedom thinkers, who then banded together and became freedom fighters; for behavior is always rooted in ideas. The freedom these prisoners craved would only be found within their means of taking their liberties, by whatever means necessary. Thus, *The Black and Gold Resistance*, the name drawn from the extinct bumble-bee that the global market helped to extinguish, was formed. You here before me, make up a part of the body of that community.

That is the story of how we came to be.

May you, old and young, brothers and sisters, take heart that we are still able to resist those that would want to crush us today. May the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be upon you as you leave.

Amen.

A Reflection From 2013

To no-one institution specific do I speak
From finance, to nation-states, to ecology
I enthrall was made by all, untraceable like the breeze
I can reap ecology's death, my strength is growing
Industrialized organization reveals wounds are showing
Your closed eyes to her dying surprise, insist in blinded knowing

Future III

May 17, 2025

Dear Momma,

Today Daddy took me to see the goat herd that makes their home in our valley. I scraped my knee as I fell off a big rock that I was climbing on. It hurt for a second, but it wasn't that bad... I am nine after all! Plus, when I saw the goats I forgot about my knee and just wanted to watch them. I wanted to play with them too but Dad said these goats might not be friendly so we would have to let them be, but that we could still watch them. He is very smart and he told me all about them. They have great-big hoofs that give them amazing balance and they eat lots of grass! They play so gracefully as they bound and leap all over the rocky ledges and they never fall. Dad says that if I keep eating my greens that maybe one day I could turn into a goat. I would love that so much!

Dad was talking to a smart man that knew even more about goats than he did, he was a type of scientist, an eeeek-ologist, or something like that; it was a hard word to say. He wasn't wearing a white lab-coat though so I'm not even sure he was a scientist at all! He knew all about the goats and was explaining that they, just like us, had to go on a journey from the coastal lands up to the higher mountains because their home was swimming now too. I'm not quite sure at all why all of our land and cities were so eager to swim, everyone was tired of being dry I guess. He said that the melting ice-caps, where the polar bears lived (yes, polar bears, Momma!), caused there to more water in the ocean and so the water rose up and the thirsty land had its fill. I feel

bad for those polar bears ‘cause I know what it’s like to not have a home to go back to....I hope they are okay. The eeky-guy also said that most coastal cities all around the world were flooded and had to be abandoned as well. Dad said to me that you were swimming too and that’s why you are not with us here. He said you were on an important water mission and so you couldn’t join us. I wish I could go swimming with you again, Momma. There are some real nice lakes around here, but they are much smaller than the ocean. You would love it!

I miss you Momma, this new home that we have is so much different than our place in New York. I still remember the song you taught me “4380 Mapleburn Street, the places where our loved ones come and meet!” I miss seeing you in the kitchen getting food ready. You would call me your little Munchkin and you would chase me around then tickle me until I was out of breath. Then we would lie on the floor and we would see what kind of pictures we could catch in the white stucko on the roof.

Dad misses you too; he doesn’t tell me as much. I think he is trying to be strong for us. But I have seen him sometimes, when he thinks he’s alone and he weeps quietly as he holds the picture of you and him that he keeps in his wallet. I wish he would talk to me about you more. We both miss you very much.

I hope you are well, wherever you are swimming. I bottled this message and sent it out to sea in hopes that it’ll find your lost shore.

Love your Little Munchkin,
-Charis

A Reflection From 2013

Human action created me exposing all upon the earth
Yet human action keeps me at bay by redefining worth
If all strive, keep the other alive, hope will not be dearth
I am not sure the storm I am will surely come to be
The human tide may still hide within a tranquil sea
Through “I and You”, you could get through, humans may find peace

Future IV

Log #467: This is Secretary General Fadhira Al Habaar, reporting in for the final log as the leader of The Global Decentralization Process. I was the one placed in charge of the committee whose job it was to carefully extract all international organizations, to reduce our exposure to manufactured uncertainties. The political nation-states, in particular those that were a part of the G8 and UN Security Councils, the most powerful nation-states, and the multinational economic monopolistic institutions were the key structures that needed to be disarmed; they became too powerful and threatened the safety of everyone. They needed to be decentralized as they had become lethal in their existence and the perpetuation of their institutions without an ethical regard for their position in a broader world, where the results of their historical externalities were threatening the well-being of every living organism on our planet, had to be addressed.

The irony of this whole undertaking was that to decentralize the global market, we first had to centralize political power, to consolidate the world into a state that had one government, so that we could reign in unfettered corporations that would pursue the path of least resistance as they hopped from border to border, exploiting the most vulnerable people who had the least government protections in place. Laissez-faire was only “fair” for those who understood the market and knew how to manipulate that arena. It was extremely vicious to most others who

lived under its merciless reign. The second stage of the decentralization process, that we were able to take care of while we had a centralized power, was that of bringing terrorists, some who were corporate and nation state leaders as well as committers of genocide and other acts of terrorism, to restitutional justice. After our holistic-justice tribunal, the third and final stage of the process is the political relinquishing of global power. This portion of the process is where the General Secretary—myself-- has to sign the abolishment contract, that puts an official end to the centralized world state. Power shall be henceforth, after the abolishment is signed, locally agreed upon due to geographic proximity and markets shall be reduced to regional areas where the profits and the products created stay predominantly within their designated region of origin.

It is absolutely astounding to imagine the power that I hold right now and to know full well that I will be giving it up as soon my name, etched in vitalized-ink, dies dryly upon the paper. I have the ability to govern life and determine the fate of billions of lives on the planet; no historical figure has ever wielded such strength. Khan, Hitler, Hun, Alexander... all would envy the reach of my arm, the arm of a woman!! And yet, I know that this power is not mine to keep, but mine to release. It has always been mine to return. It was always a burden temporarily given. Power has never been meant for one person nor one group to wield, but has always asked to be given to the other that we encounter in a received interaction.

I will sign the paper and be released into peace. I will usher in a new chapter, a decentralized world where locales of humanity are self-determinant.

Now I am free from this crucible, from the ever aching weight of the capability to enhance the existence of billions of lives or in turn, to cast misery upon those souls who grovelled at my feet. No person, no institution, should ever be able to determine the fate of the masses of humanity; communities need to be self-determining, to toil in failure and make success out of better attempts to tracing out the age-dusted question: what does it mean to human? I will sign the paper and be released into peace. I will lead by example as we explore the unwritten pages of our future from this hopeful vantage point.

We halted the greatest threat to humanity by receiving each other in humility, by not allowing ourselves to take our stations too seriously to the point of harming others.

Signed,

Fadhira Al Habaar, mother, thinker, artist, baker, lover, sister, daughter, optimist, friend, organism.

A Reflection From 2013

I am the aggregate of human institution
I exist, in foreboding mist of deathly constitution
I am not sole, for I am whole and am a human creation.
Who am I? You fairly inquire and entreat
I am the one who is a future catastrophe
I not now, on horizons brow, am manufactured uncertainty.

Epilogue

In all time we stand on the coast of the irrevocable openness of the future, looking out into the infinite horizon of a sky that traces oranges and reds, yellows and purples into a milky array. The inevitable future summons our grandest dreams and calls forth our greatest fears. The humanizing moment of meaning happens in our present as we face our biggest question: will we bleed together like the skies blended-beautiful palate and continue writing our story, or will we

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